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DE RUEHBR #0596/01 0821927
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 231927Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4924
INFO RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 3882
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 5396
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ 4445
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2900
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RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 6129
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO 1057
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3164
RUEHRG/AMCONSUL RECIFE 4511
RUEHSO/AMCONSUL SAO PAULO 6621
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 1756
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RHEBAAA/DOE WASHDC
RUEHC/DOI WASHDC
RUEAWJA/DOJ WASHDC
RUEAEPA/HQ EPA WASHDC
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HILL-MACON, SJOHNSON, JAYRES USDA FOR ARS/INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH:
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SUBJECT: LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES DISCUSS URBAN AIR QUALITY IN
COCHABAMBA, BOLIVIA

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Summary

The Universidad Catolica Boliviana hosted the 1st Bolivian Congress on Urban Air Quality Management March 16-18 in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The event was attended by students, environmentalists, scientists, academics, and international consultants from several Latin American countries. Air pollution is a general concern for Latin American cities, yet most countries lack the funding and political will to implement urban air pollution mitigation measures. Post believes EPA's increasing support in training and exchanging information with these countries would be of great value. End summary.

The Event

1. The 1st Bolivian Congress on Urban Air Quality Management, held in Cochabamba March 16-18, brought together students, environmentalists, scientists, academics, and international

consultants from several Latin American countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Cuba, Mexico, and Chile). The meeting was an opportunity for countries to exchange information, know-how, and experiences on air quality management in urban areas.

¶2. One of the event's main objectives was to raise awareness of environmental authorities and municipal, state, and national governments about the need to develop regional and national systems to manage air quality in urban areas. Important themes discussed included monitoring of atmospheric contamination, inventories of pollutant emissions, contaminant diffusion and dispersion models, atmospheric contamination prediction models, evaluation of health and environmental impacts, and strategies and plans of action for emission reduction, norms, and indicators.

The Situation in Bolivia

¶3. Although Bolivia does not currently have high levels of urban air pollution, increasing car emissions may result in a decline in air quality. According to the World Bank, 70 percent of Bolivia's air contamination comes from vehicles, only a third of which pass emissions tests. With fifty percent of the country's population living in urban areas and the size of Bolivia's car fleet increasing dramatically, this represents a source of growing concern. Thus, it is necessary to develop qualified human resources and legal and technical experts in order to effectively manage air quality.

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Current Regional Efforts and Levels of Expertise
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¶4. One of the main sponsors of the event was Swisscontact, a Swiss non-governmental organization involved in development cooperation

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(www.swisscontact.org). Swisscontact has worked with air quality control in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador. Their work in South America is carried out through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (COSUDE).

¶5. Several countries sent delegations with substantial individual and institutional knowledge. Ecuador sent three representatives from a non-governmental organization specializing in urban air quality control, CORPAIRE (www.corpaire.org). The NGO's experts demonstrated an advanced level of preparedness in the issue. Representatives from Mexico and Chile were by far the most knowledgeable and experienced at the event.

¶6. Bolivia, on the other hand, is probably the country in most need of technical capacity-building. Many researchers and students from universities in La Paz and Cochabamba were present and demonstrated interest in learning from neighboring countries. However, local environmental authorities were not present at the event, which demonstrated a lack of political interest in the topic (a comment made by the event organizers themselves).

Conclusion

¶7. A Swisscontact representative commented, during the opening of the event, that within the past ten years, Latin Americans have been able to build up enough expertise in air quality issues to "walk on their own feet." Despite the scarcity of financial and human resources, most countries seem to have a good grasp of the direction they are heading with respect to air quality control. However, according to an expert from Arequipa (Peru), Latin American countries would benefit from U.S. training in air quality management. In fact, EPA methods and information were broadly used by several speakers. To the majority, EPA is a worldwide reference for air quality standards and technical expertise.

¶8. Although these countries have a broad knowledge at a policy and

scientific level, few are able to actually implement urban air pollution mitigation measures due to a lack of funding and political will. Even though the event was a unique opportunity for Latin American countries to compare notes on urban air quality management, it did not reach its objective in trying to sensitize and energize governmental entities to focus on the issue with urgency. Post believes it would be beneficial to either arrange a Voluntary Visitors program for South American air quality experts or to carry out EPA-led training sessions in countries such as Bolivia and Peru.

An opportunity will present itself next year to work with these countries, as Colombia announced that it will be hosting a similar event March 14-16, 2007, at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

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